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SUBJECT: THAI GIVE OK ON U.S. RESETTLEMENT OF SIX NORTH KOREANS BUT TIGHT LEASH

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH BOYCE, REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

1. (C) Summary. The RTG has given formal approval for U.S. resettlement of North Korean refugees on a case-by-case, discreet basis and for U.S. resettlement of the first group of six North Koreans. However, Thai sensitivities about this issue remain. Any publicity would complicate the issue and conceivably lead to a reversal of the Thai position. End summary.

2. (C) Ambassador spoke to Thai National Security Council (NSC) chief General Winai Phattiyakul on April 20 regarding the RTG position on U.S. resettlement of the six North Koreans refugees. General Winai reaffirmed the RTG willingness to work with the United States and UNHCR on this issue. He also noted the continuing RTG concern that U.S. resettlement of the six could pull more North Koreans into Thailand. He stressed that any publicity would complicate the issue.

3. (C) NSC staff told Refcoord on April 21 that the NSC had chaired a meeting the previous day which included the MFA and other concerned RTG agencies. They had discussed the pros and cons of U.S. resettlement of North Koreans. There was agreement at the meeting that the United States could resettle North Korean refugees from Thailand on a case-by-case, discreet basis. If the United States accepted the six North Koreans for resettlement, that was acceptable to the RTG. However, their cases must not become public. The NSC staffer added that the RTG must enforce its immigration laws in northern Thailand. If North Koreans nevertheless were able to gain entry into Thailand, they could be resettled to South Korea or the United States on the terms previously mentioned.

4. (C) Comment. The formal RTG approval for discreet, case-by-case resettlement of North Koreans and for the immediate case of the six North Koreans, is welcome. But the RTG is laying down markers that publicity about this initial group, either during their resettlement processing or after, would complicate matters and conceivably lead to a reversal of the RTG position. Given the RTG comments, Post is concerned that a Time magazine article that may be published next week about North Korean refugees could undermine our efforts. The general RTG position about case-by-case resettlement is exactly that. There is no blanket RTG approval for future North Korean cases. Post notes that the arrival of any additional North Koreans seeking U.S. resettlement while we are processing this first group would be problematic. We should also keep in mind that given overall Thai sensitivities, any indication that the USG is encouraging or complicit in the movement of North Koreans into Thailand would undercut our ability to work with the RTG on this issue. End comment.

BOYCE